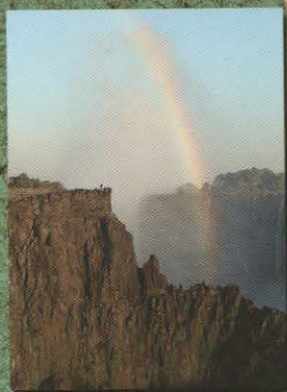
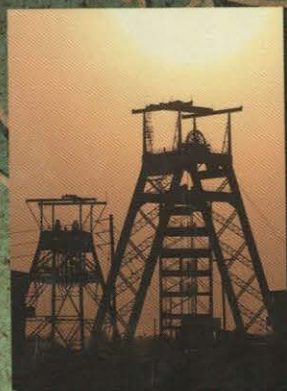
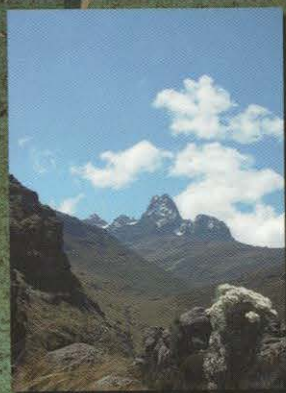


# AFRICAN PLACENAMES

Origins and Meanings of the  
Names for Natural Features, Towns,  
Cities, Provinces and Countries

Second Edition



ADRIAN ROOM



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A foutre for the world and worldlings base!  
I speak of Africa and golden joys.

— William Shakespeare, *Henry IV, Part 2*, V, iii

## Preface

This is a revised and enlarged edition of a book first published in 1994. Many of the entries have been expanded or entirely rewritten and their number has increased to more than 2,500. There is a completely new Introduction, comprising a geographical summary, a chronological account of the exploration and colonization (settlement) of Africa, and an overview of its languages. There are now seven Appendices, instead of the original four, and the Select Bibliography has been appropriately updated.

The 13 years that have passed in the interim have seen a number of changes in Africa, with several new placenames appearing on the map, as for instance the Democratic Republic of the Congo, transmuted from Zaire in 1997. The most dramatic renamings, however, have been in South Africa, where the so-called bantustans or "homelands," populated and administered by blacks, disappeared with the official ending of apartheid in 1994, in many cases taking their names with them. The long-familiar Orange Free State, in the center of the country, became simply the Free State, while further north the new provinces of Gauteng and Mpumalanga appeared. The larger municipalities of the executive capital, Bloemfontein, and de facto capital, Pretoria, gained the respective names Mangaung and Tshwane, while in the former Northern province, now Limpopo, Louis Trichardt was renamed Makhado and Pietersburg became Polokwane. In the south, the Cape Province ceased to exist as an administrative entity and was (roughly) divided into the three new provinces Eastern Cape, Northern Cape, and Western Cape.

Other countries also experienced administrative alterations. In Nigeria, six new states were added in 1996 to the 30 already existing, while more radically a government decree of 2001 replaced the 45 native-named provinces of Burkina Faso by 15 French-named regions. A reorganization of this kind actually bucks the trend, as in most parts of the continent European names have been replaced by African ones, rather than the other way around. More recently, in 2006 the 12 provinces of Rwanda were replaced by the five provinces East, North, South, West, and Kigali, the last named for the country's capital. The move was made to create more ethnically diverse administrative areas and greater decentralization of power.

All such additions and alterations were taken into account during compilation of the present edition, which in order to be finite took as its deadline the close of 2007.



MADERAS, some islands situated in the Atlantic ocean, three hundred miles west of Salée, in Africa.... The largest of them, called Madera, or rather Mat-era, by the Portuguese, is about an hundred and twenty miles in circumference, and produces incredible quantities of wine, which has the peculiar quality of keeping best in hot climates, where other wines turn sour. [*Madeira*]

MAGADOXA, the capital of the territory of the same name, at the mouth of the river Magadoxa, on the coast of Anian, in Africa. [*Mogadishu*, Somalia]

MELINDA, the capital of the province of the same name and of all the Portuguese settlements on the coast of Malabar, in Africa. [*Malindi*, Kenya]

MOMBAZA, or MONBASA, an island and city on the east coast of Africa, opposite to the country of Mombaza, in Zanguebar. [*Mombasa*, Kenya]

MOROCCO, the capital of the kingdom of the same name in Africa. [*Marrakech*, Morocco]

MOSAMBIQUE, the capital of a province of the same name in Zanguebar, in Africa, situated on an island at the mouth of the river Mosambique. [*Moçambique*, Mozambique]

MULVIA, a river of Barbary, in Africa, which rises in the mountains of Atlas, and divides the empire of Morocco from the kingdom of Algiers, and then falls into the Mediterranean, west of Marsalquiver. [*Moulouya*, Morocco]

NIGER, a great river of Africa, which runs from east to west through the middle of Negroland, and discharges itself into the Atlantic ocean by three channels, called Rio Grande, Gambia, and the river Senega. It is 300 miles between the northern and southern channels; and all the country between them is annually overflowed, as Egypt is by the Nile. [*Niger*]

NILE, a great river in Egypt, having its source in Abyssinia, or the Upper Ethiopia. [*Nile*]

NUBIA, a country of Africa, bounded by the desert of Barca, on the north; by Egypt and Abyssinia, on the east; by the Lower Ethiopia, on the south; and by the deserts of Africa, on the west. [*Nubia*, northern Africa]

SALEE, a port-town of the empire of Morrocco, in the kingdom of Fez, situated on the coast of the Atlantic ocean. [*Salé*, Morocco]

SINAI, a mountain of Arabia Petrea, ... memorable on account of the law's being given to the Jews on this mount. [*Sinai*, Egypt]

SUEZ, a port-town of Egypt, situated at the bottom of the Red-sea, seventy miles east of Cairo: it is from this town that the isthmus of Suez, which joins Africa to Asia, takes its name. [*Suez*, Egypt]

TETUAN, a town of the empire of Morocco, situated about eight miles from the bay of that name, just within the straits of Gibraltar. [*Tétouan*, Morocco]

TRIPOLI, a state of Africa, which including Barca, is bounded by the Mediterranean sea on the north, by Egypt on the east, by Nubia and Bildulgerid on the south, and by Tunis on the west; extending along the shore of the Mediterranean from the north-west to the south-east about a thousand miles, but scarce two hundred miles broad in any place. [*Tripoli*, Libya]

TUNIS, the capital of the kingdom of Tunis, thirty miles south of Carthage ruins, 300 miles east of Algiers, and 120 south-west of Trapano, in Sicily; a populous city, about three miles in circumference. [*Tunis*, Tunisia]

VERD, or CAPE-VERD, a promontory of Africa, forty miles north west of the mouth of the river Gambia. [*Cap Vert*, Senegal]

ZAARA, one of the divisions of Africa, situated under the tropic of cancer, is bounded by Bildulgerid on the north, by the unknown parts of Africa on the east, by Nigritia or Negroland on the south, and by the Atlantic ocean on the west. This is a barren desert, and so destitute of water, that the camels which pass over it from Morocco to traffic with Negroland, are half loaded with water and provisions. [*Sahara*, northern Africa]

ZANGUEBAR, a country on the east coast of Africa, situated in southern latitude between the equator and the tropic of capricorn, being bounded by the country of Anian on the north, by the Indian ocean on the west [*sic*], by Caffraria on the south, and by the unknown parts of Africa on the west. [*Zanzibar*, eastern Africa]

## Select Bibliography

The first and main part of the listing below contains the titles of works consulted for information on African places and their names. Some are quite narrowly focused in geographical scope; others cover a broader field. Either way, they played their part in the present compilation. Foreign titles are translated into English for ease of reference, and some titles have an appended note in square brackets by way of comment or recommendation.

Titles of works consulted for placename spellings are given at the end of the main listing.

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*Merriam-Webster's Geographical Dictionary*. 3d ed. Merriam-Webster, Springfield, MA: 1997. [A key reference tool containing concise histories of all African countries, with listings of political divisions (administrative regions) for many, and past and present names of significant places, with their pronunciations.]

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Internet users can access many of the articles listed above, whatever the language, by entering author and/or title in their search engine. Further information on African placenames can also be found by entering *placenames* (or the equivalent) and the name of the country. Two examples are [http://www.african-languages.com/south\\_africa/place\\_names\\_sagns.html](http://www.african-languages.com/south_africa/place_names_sagns.html), listing South African names and origins from the South African Geographical Names System database, and [http://www.alger-roi.net/Alger/alger\\_son\\_histoire.htm](http://www.alger-roi.net/Alger/alger_son_histoire.htm), a French site giving the origins of colonial names of towns and villages in Algeria (but not of their present names). The authority of such sites cannot be guaranteed, although most academic sites are reliable.

As well as the above sources, compilation of material for the present book was complemented by a number of travel guides, such as those published by Bradt Travel Guides (Globe Pequot Press in the USA), Dorling Kindersley, Footprint, Insight Guides, Lonely Planet, and Rough Guides, especially for information on local background. As with the online sites, such books are too numerous to list here, but by way of example three separate guides to Morocco were carefully combed (the Rough Guides 7th edition of 2004, Dorling Kindersley edition of 2006, and Lonely Planet edition of 2007), as were the Footprint *Namibia* by Lizzie Williams (4th edition, 2006) and the 834-page *South Africa* by Francisca Kellett and Lizzie Williams (8th edition, 2006). Smaller guides, such as the "Globetrotter" series published by New Holland, were likewise drawn on, and Paul Tingay's 128-page *Zimbabwe*, published in 2001, is a good example of the more succinct account.

Also consulted were individual numbers of the *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London* (founded 1831), forerunner of the current *Geographical Journal* (founded 1893), as well as the intermediate *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society of London* and *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society of London and Monthly Record of Geography*, especially issues with first-hand accounts by 19th-century explorers in Africa. The names in the latter are often approximately or even inaccurately transcribed, but the documentation and interpretation of such names is all grist to the onomastic mill.